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"I Write Unto You, Fathers—"

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By Cleland B. McAfee, D.D.

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A portion of a sermon delivered by Dr. McAfee in the Lafayette Avenue Church, Brooklyn, N. Y., in March, 1912, on "THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY" from the text: Matthew 9:38.

This, the latter half of Dr. McAfee's discourse, deals so earnestly with the responsibility of parents for holding the ideal of the ministry before the sons of the Church, that it is sent out to the parents of our Presbyterian communion by the Executive Committee with the earnest prayer that its message may be laid to heart by thousands of fathers and mothers.

"I Write Unto You, Fathers—"

By Cleland B. McAfee, D.D.

I remember that some one in our church once suggested to me that sermons to young people were always belated, since they should be preached rather to parents. I remember that godly fathers and mothers dedicated their sons to the ministry; that Hannah carried her lad Samuel to the tabernacle that he might be trained for his prophetic office. I remember that Timothy was dedicated to God first by his mother and his grandmother. I turn therefore to parents and to those who have influence in determining the course of young lives, and lay upon you the solemn responsibility for the Christian ministry of the future.

You cannot put your boys into the ministry—you might curse them if you did. The ministry is a profession in some sense, and parents might choose it for their boys; but the ministry is far more a calling, and boys hear the call of God in their secret hearts. What may be asked of parents is that they shall not deaden the ears of their sons to the call of God, by the clamor of other things which they propose or keep before them, that they shall open the way for the hearing of that call—that they shall dedicate their sons to the greatest of all work, if it be God's will to call them to it. Many a son has borne witness that when he had heard and heeded the call of God to the Gospel ministry and had gone

to tell his parents the unexpected news, their eyes had in them only a look of gratitude. They had dedicated their sons long ago to that service. They had brought no pressure to bear upon them. They did not run before the Spirit of God, but they did not block His way, and they held the work of the Gospel ministry in such esteem that their sons were won to it. So much at least may be asked of parents.

In order to do that, it will be necessary for many to change their thought of the ministry. It must be dignified for some, and stripped of false dignity for others. The Christian ministry is not a field of cheap privilege. If it should be thought of in terms of social position, or of the privileges of study and the intellectual life, it will never be made winsome to the kind of boys whom the ministry today needs. Nor is it a field of harsh hardships, of such sacrifice that the Christian minister is to be thought of as apart from others, without their qualities and enjoyments. Above all, it must be set apart entirely from the whole matter of financial return.

It ought to be a matter of great concern to a congregation like this to realize that the homes of the rich or the very prosperous seldom send boys into the ministry. They do not come, either, from the homes of the very poor. Nothing could more accent the spiritual meaning of the ministry than those two facts. In those two extremes of wealth and poverty, the pressure of the world and temporal things is very strong, equally strong. Abundance on the one hand and lack on the other lessens the value of spiritual realities. So, city homes furnish fewer boys for the

ministry than village homes—city homes where the need for the ministry ought to press most heavily on the minds of the parents and the boys —city homes from which in theory we might expect largest recruiting for the ministry, these furnish the smallest number of recruits. It is material pressure that prevents. City boys' ambitions are dwarfed by what they see all about them, dwarfed by what they hear constantly. They cannot be rich in the ministry. They cannot make rapid progress to the ministry; there is a long course of preparation required.

Most subtle of all is the fact that the cities have in them so many of the outstanding men of the ministry, the Beechers, the Halls, the Cuylers. They are apt to be much entangled with tasks that look large. Boys in their churches do not think of themselves in comparison with them. Their only contact with them accents their distance from their own lives. In villages the ministers are as faithful, as earnest, as richly blessed, but they are not so remote from their people. What chance has a city minister to know the boys of his church? What chance have they to know him? How can he be kept, in view of the peculiar demands of his work, from seeming somewhat different from other men, from seeming to be in a class by himself in which they never think of placing themselves? It is the business of parents to overcome that, to see that their own ideas of the Gospel ministry are right, to hold the work of the ministry before their boys not as something remote from their possibilities, but as a work to which they might aspire and in which they might expect to find the largest outlay of their strength.

Especially ought parents in the cities to safeguard their thoughts of the temporal rewards of life for their boys. There are two great professions in which no man can ever grow rich, in which increasing efficiency is not matched with increasing temporal reward, yet which come nearest to the heart of the world's need. Those two professions are teaching and the ministry of the Gospel. A lawyer may grow wealthy in the legitimate practice of the law. A doctor, a merchant, an engineer may grow rich in worldly things by following his task. Neither a teacher nor a minister can do so. Sometimes a man grows bitter about the absurd inequality of the temporal reward for teaching. One college professor wrote recently that teachers only turn boys and girls into nobler men and women, while a successful advertising writer can turn a lie into dollars, so of course he deserves the higher pay. Another wrote that the teacher cares only for the child of the rich man, while his chauffeur cares for his expensive machine, so the salary of the chauffeur is raised and the salary of the teacher is resented as a burden, or too heavy to be increased.

A minister recently spoke in my hearing with a sad sarcasm of the fact that his salary as minister of the church which he serves is not only the same as his predecessor received twenty-five years ago, but is the same as he himself received ten years ago, with his family growing up about him. He asked if there was any way by which a minister's increased efficiency is ever recognized by his church, and the general reply of those who heard his question was that there is no way such as he meant.

Now in all of these complaints both of teachers and ministers of the Gospel there is truth, but both deal only with an accepted fact regarding these two great callings. They are not rated in terms of temporal rewards. Their rewards lie in another field, and those rewards are richer in that more important field than for any other calling in life. Men who belong in either calling of preaching or teaching would not exchange with men in other lines of service with all their rewards. But how shall a young man turn his face eagerly and hopefully to the ministry when at his father's table he hears the necessary financial restriction asserted and receives the impression that a man's success is to be determined by his financial income? How shall a young man rejoice to enter the ministry of the Gospel when he knows that a Christian man can say of him, "I cannot see why he does that—there is no money in it!"

My brethren, it will not be until your thought of the ministry is safe on the one hand from cheap estimate, and on the other from impossible idealizing that you will surround your son with such an atmosphere that he can hear the call of God if He should utter it to him. You must think of the ministry as a field of supreme opportunity. Never feel sorry for a minister, and as you value the future of the church, never pity a minister in the presence of a boy! You give the lad an entirely wrong attitude toward the greatest work to which he could aspire. Let him know that his call to the ministry would crown your home and your life and service with dignity and honor. Does it not seem a great enough thing for your boy that he should be in

a peculiar sense God's fellow worker, as Paul assures the young minister, Timothy, that he was? You would be honored by his fellowship with a great financier or merchant. Here is a higher partnership, in which he can cast in his lot with the heart of God at work in the universe.

There were in London many rich merchants, but you have missed the point of your Christian faith if you compare Charles Spurgeon or Joseph Parker with them. There were young men who considered that Dwight L. Moody had done a very foolish thing when he left the lucrative business of selling shoes to become a minister of the Gospel. One of his schoolmates thought that Hunter Corbett had done very foolishly in going to China to bury himself as a Christian missionary, and the schoolmate has a comfortable home in a town in Kansas of which you never heard and Hunter Corbett, burying his life in China, has borne a harvest that not a thousand such lives as that of his schoolmate could ever yield.

You say all ministers are not that kind? No, but they are as nearly all that kind as lawyers are of the kind you want your boy to be. They are as nearly all that kind as doctors are of the kind you want your boy to be, or merchants, or engineers. You will rejoice to see your son go into the law or into medicine or into engineering, in the hope that he will succeed; but you fear to have him go into the ministry lest he fail in it. Why not expect that he may succeed in it? If God calls him into the ministry he will be a larger servant of the world than he will be in any of these other professions. Yet there are doubtless boys here who have heard their fathers say that

they would not care to have a son of theirs go into the ministry, and daughters who have heard their mothers say that they at least should not become missionaries! We claim to have seen the face of our Lord and to be saved by His Gospel and to believe it is meant for the world, and we hold our sons and daughters back from Him!

We must think of the ministry as the place of supreme opportunity because it is the place of service where need is greatest. Dr. Cuyler used to say that this pulpit was ten thousand miles higher than any throne of any king in the world. Joseph Parker hoped he might die while he was preaching, for the distance between the pulpit and heaven is not great. How shall one describe the work of the Christian minister? He must take of the things of Christ and under guidance of the Spirit show them unto men. He must learn the truth of God, of this life and the next, and teach it to men. When men are in sorrow he comes to them with an unfailing comfort. When men are discouraged, he takes them cheer which cannot fail. He brings them as no other does the assurance of redemption from sin and eternal safeguard against it. This is not the incidental work of the Christian minister as it may be the incidental work of the Christian merchant. This is the life task of the minister. This is the life opportunity of the minister. You cannot wonder that I urge upon you parents that you do not shut your sons away from it, but that you keep the air about them clear so that they can hear God's voice if He should honor them by speaking to them, calling them to the ministry.

I point out your duty also not only in the dedication of your sons, but in the encouragement of those who are on the way to the ministry. Many of you have no sons to dedicate. The sons of some of you are plainly called to other fields of service, but you cannot forget that you ought never to leave out of account the boys and young men whom God has called, and who are on their way toward the ministry. In them lie the hope and future of the church. They deserve the encouragement of all those who love the church of Christ. I wonder why some of you who are being prospered now, who feel that your tongues are tied so that you cannot speak the Gospel to your fellow men, do not realize that you can prepare young men, can open their mouths so that they shall speak, as for you, the truth of Christ. Many a Moses who cannot speak has in the past under God's guidance, found an Aaron who could speak, and has gone his way rejoicing because the message was so plainly told. But your encouragement can be given in many other ways. You can always let it be known that you rejoice when a young man turns his face toward the Gospel ministry, that your mind is not always on the hardships and difficulties he will encounter, but is on the joyous opportunities that will be open to him, and that wherever he goes he will have your remembrance and encouragement.

But our thinking must swing back to our starting point, to the attitude we must take as lovers of the church, as lovers of the world. It is ours to pray the Lord of the harvest that He will select and train and thrust forth laborers into His harvest. The great days of the ministry are

not over. There will be no great future church without a great future ministry. Let our lips not fail in our prayer to God that when a lad is called, the spiritual forces shall be at work in his behalf and he shall not only hear the call, but shall be thrust forward on his way until he stands to speak the glorious Gospel of Christ. "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest." Join your spiritual forces with His. So in the future ministry of the church you will have your part.

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For Parents, Pastors and Teachers.

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"Prayer for Men for the Ministry," Rev. Wm. Hoge Marquess, D.D., LL.D.

"Religion in the Home," Rev. Walter W. Moore, D.D., LL.D.

"I Write Unto You, Fathers—," Rev. Cleland B. McAfee, D.D.

For Young Boys.

"A Pocket Full of Gems," Mildred Welch. Containing eight earnest messages to boys.

"What is to be Your Life-Work? Why not the Ministry?" Rev. A. M. Fraser, D.D.

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